A LITTLE IRISH GIRL.

By "The Duchess."

CHAPTER XII—CONTINUED.

"Mr. Eyre? I'm not thinking of him."

"Of who then, darlin'?"

"Sir Ralph," faintly.

"Arrah, nonsense! sure you know he'll niver hear of it!" says nurse, who, after all, in spite of her many good qualities, is frail.

"He will know; he shall know!" says her young mistress, springing to her feet.

"Eh?" Mrs. Driscoll regards her with apprehension; what does she mean now? "Sit down; you're tired, Miss Dulcie, dear," says she, with all the air of one trying to cajole an angry child.

"I shall tell him!" says Dulcie with determination.

"Faix, you won't," says Mrs. Driscoll. "'Tis mad ye are just now, but when mornin' comes, an' I've a talk at ye agin, ye'll know where yer right road lies."

"Oh, to-morrow,' says Dulcie with a groan; "do you know he is coming to dinner to-morrow? Father asked him and—but perhaps he will get out of it now. He hates me; I know that; I've reasons for knowing it."

"Raysons!" "There isn't a rayson in ye," says Mrs. Driscoll, with supreme contempt. "As if any one, with an eye that wasn't yours, couldn't see that he just delights in the sight o' ye. Why 'twas only yesterday I overheard yer father sayin—"

"Oh, father!" impatiently. "Father wants me to think as you do. By-the-bye, Bridget," turning a frightened face to her nurse, "what of father? Where is he? what did he say? was he asking for me? is he very angry?"

"Wisha, me dear, he knows nothin' of it."

"Nothing?"

"Ne'er a ha'porth. By all the luck o' the world Micky Flynn took to fightin' again this evenin' shortly afther you—wint for yer walk—and the divil's own thrade he made of it. It appears that he an' Danny Murphy wint at it tooth an' nail down in the village below, all about nothin' but that ould ancient goose as Danny sould to Mrs. Flynn for a shillin' (an' faix, between ourselves, Miss, it was —— ould), an' Mickey let into his skin like mad, an' Danny is now lyin' kilt below in his cabin, wid his wife screechin' over him like a burn't cat."

"Not dead!" horror-stricken.

"Oh, no, me dear! just a rib or two; but 'twas a most marciful occurrence. You see, they sint for the masther at once,an' down he wint to Dan's house, an niver a word has he heard of your bein' in or out."

"Oh!' says Dulcinea, with a long sigh of intense relief. So much will be spared her, at all events.

"I've had a grudge against Flynn for ten year," says Mrs. Driscoll. "He once promised to marry my sister's cousin's nephew by marriage,an' he niver got as far as the aither; but I forgive him now. He's done a good job for ye this night. And now, darlint, won't ye let me undhress ye, an' put ye to bed? You're worn out. I can see it. An' a poached egg an' a cup o' tay, that'll be the revivin' of ye. I'll bring it up to ye whin yer undressed. Ye'll sleep aisy afther it."

CHAPTER XIII.

"Is there no place
Left for repentance,none for pardon left?"

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"My life's a load."

But in spite of the poached egg and the tea, Dulcinea hardly slept at all. There was half an hour here and there of broken slumber, in which uncomfortable dreams had full sway, to the greater destroying of her peace when awakening from them; but beyond that she lay all night with open eyes, thinking unhappy things, and crying inwardly, with great longings for the day.

And at last it comes, reluctantly, as all winter mornings come, having no light of life to warm them. The sun for them lies dead. He may be there, somewhere, but his glory is denied them. A dull, cloudy, gray, taciturn day makes clear the window panes to Dulcinea—so silent, so devoid of sound is it, indeed, that one might almost think of nature as lying in her shroud.

A shroud typical! Outside, all the world is swathed in a white sheet—the garb of death. During the night the soft flakes had fallen, silently, steadily, and now branch and leaf are laden with them. There had been snow before, but nothing like this. And still it falls.

"Through the hushed air the whitening shower descends,
At first thin, wavering, till at last the flakes
Fall broad and white and fast, dimming the day
With a continual flow."

Dulcinea's first thought on seeing the day is that Anketell will not be able to come over to dinner. This should have caused her relief; but to her surprise it causes her only a deepening of the depression that is weighing her down. Oh, he must come! He must! How can she live with this burden on her mind? She will confess all to him, will tell him everything; will open to him the way to rid himself honorably of her—to put an end to his hated engagement.

All day she wanders aimlessly from room to room, longing for, whilst dreading, the hour that sha'l tell her if he is or is not coming. Toward five o'clock she finds herself in the schoolroom once again, and sinking into a chair rests her elbows on her knees and lets her lovely, disconsolate face fall into her little chilly palms.

Five! If coming, he will be here in three-quarters of an hour. The snow is still falling, heavily, steadily. No one could go out on such a night unless compelled; and he—why,no doubt he will be glad of the excuse to keep away. And yet something within her whispers he will come.

Three-quarters of an hour! It must be a great deal less than that now. Raising her eyes to the clock, she is astonished to find it is only three minutes less. What on earth is the matter with that old clock? She taps it—listens; no, it is going as methodically as ever. Will a quarter to six ever come? He is sure to arrive then. The McDermot dining always at six sharp, and being seriously annoyed if a guest is not on the spot some time beforehand. How often she and Ra—Sir Ralph had laughed over that little eccentricity of his.

A sound in the firelit room behind her makes her spring to her feet. Oh no! not yet! Not until she has grasped the back of the chair and has learned that the incomer is Andy, does she know that she is trembling from head to foot and that her lips have grown so cold—so horridly cold.

"My word! you're growing active in your old age," says Mr. McDermot, advancing cheerfully to the fire and poking it into a glorious blaze. "As a traveling acrobat you'd make your fortune. What makes you bounce out of your chair like that? Guilty conscience, eh?" with a grin. "And I say! What a swell you are! Put on all that toggery to fascinate Anketell over again? I declare, Dulcie, you're the biggest flirt I ever met. You are hardly off with the new lover before you want to be on with the old."

"I don't want to be on with anybody," says Dulcinea, crimsoning with shame and indignation. "It's a horrid old gown, and you know it. You've seen it fifty times if once. If you've come here only to torment me—only to —to—make a fool of yourself, I hope you'll go away again."

"I merely" (pulling up his coat and preparing to warm himself properly at the fire) "made the remark that you were distinctly good to look at. Now anyone who can manage to look well in a gown fifty times old must be a lovely girl indeed. See? It was a compliment, my dear girl; why, then, this ungrateful virulence?"

"Stuff!" says his cousin, with increasing ingratitude. The fact is, she had had something on her mind when dressing, something that led to a desire to look her best before Sir Ralph on this—last evening. For that it would be his last as her fiance seems undoubted to her. It was an old gown she donned, a shabby little black gown; but the square in front showed a lovely neck that gleamed whiter and more lovely than the snow outside, and the soft, bare arms that fell at her side as she gazed at herself in the glass worked wonders with the ancient costume.

Mr McDermot, unmoved by her last remark, drops leisurely on to the fender.

"I say, Dulcie, how did you and he get on last evening?"

"About as badly as you can imagine."

"Imagination is not my strong point," says Mr. McDermot, modestly, speaking the truth for once in his life. "About how badly, now?"

"Well, I have known him for twelve long months, and never, never in all that time was he so—so abominable to me!"

"Abominable!" — angrily — "If I thought——"

"Oh, no!" shaking her charming head so that the firelight flickers from her long lashes, to the little soft natural fluff of hair that blows across her forehead. "Not abominable in that way. He was quite polite—hatefully polite; never speaking a word or smiling—or ——"

"How the deuce could you know whether he was smiling or not—the night was as black as soot?"

"At first! Not after! I saw well enough. And besides, his voice would tell you he wasn't smiling."

"I dare say it was you who wasn't smiling."

"Oh! of course you are sure to put me in the wrong, whether or no." A very pretty quarrel is here spoiled by one of the combatants giving in.

"Never mind that," says he. "Do you mean to tell me he—was—well—wasn't like what a fellow engaged to you should be?"

"Oh no; indeed he wasn't!" (emphatically). "He was downright brusque. He—he quite ordered me to put my hands under the rug!"

"And you obeyed?"

"Well—er—yes. B'— (shamefacedly) "I—he was so cross, I thought perhaps I had better."

"I can't understand it," says Andy, wrinkling up his brows (these are so low that it doesn't take a second to do it). "Dulcie!" (turning to her in a rather tragic way), "do you think you were right after all—that he was there, I mean? that he saw you and—and that other fellow?"

"No" (dejectedly). "Oh no" (hanging her pretty head so low that even a Paraglite might feel sore for her). "The fact is, Andy, that he hates me."

"What?"

"He hates me!" repeated she, with rising strength that is strong through its grief. "That's all."

"And enough, too," says Mr. McDermot. "Only," drawing himself up, "I don't believe it."

"It's true for all that" (forlornly). I've known it for a long time. After all," meditating, "why shouldn't he?"

"Why should he?" says Andy vigorously. "Why, look here; you're as nice a girl as I know anyway! Oh, go to the deuce!" says Mr. McDermot, as if addressing some imaginary person at the end of the room. "D'ye think I can't see? I tell you this, Dulcie, he'll find it hard to get as good as you."

"Ah, Andy! what a dear you are!" says his cousin, and bursts out crying. "But I tell you it's true for all that," says she, sobbing. "He hates me—he does really, and when he comes tonight I shall tell him all about it, and set him free."

"Free!"

"Free from his engagement with me. You can't see as clearly as I do, Andy; and I know he will be delighted to get a chance of saying good-by to me forever."

"You mean to say that you are going to tell him?" Mr. McDermot is gazing at her with distended eyes.

"Yes, just that. I can't live with this secret on my mind. And it is dishonorable too, Andy; you must see that. If he knew that I—that I—once even, once thought of—Oh!," miserably "it is very hard to say it. But you know, don't you?"

"Yes, I know."

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

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W. N. U. D.,—10—25.

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